

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 CEA-01 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-01 CIEP-01

STR-01 TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 SAM-01 OMB-01 NIC-01

AGR-05 /086 W

----- 019188

R 302003Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6899

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 16851

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EEC

SUBJECT: INDUSTRY SECRETARY ATTACKS BRITISH EC MEMBER-  
SHIP

REF: A) LONDON 16460; B) LONDON 16677; C) LONDON 14535

SUMMARY: INDUSTRY SECRETARY BENN DECEMBER 29 PUBLICLY  
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ATTACKED BRITISH EC MEMBERSHIP ON GROUNDS THAT IT DIMIN-

ISHED SOVEREIGNTY OF BRITISH PEOPLE. BENN'S STATEMENT, WHICH APPEARS DESIGNED TO PREJUDICE EC RENEGOTIATIONS AND GOVERNMENT POSITION ON CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP, RECEIVED HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE. AS YET, HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER HAS NOT INDICATED HOW HE PLANS TO HANDLE THIS LATEST VIOLATION OF COLLECTIVE CABINET RESPONSIBILITY DOCTRINE. END SUMMARY.

1. INDUSTRY SECRETARY ANTHONY BENN SHARPLY ATTACKED CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP IN EC DECEMBER 29 IN OPEN LETTER TO HIS CONSTITUENTS. BASING HIS ATTACK EXCLUSIVELY ON SOVEREIGNTY ISSUE (LETTER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT ADDRESSED NEITHER POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC PROS AND CONS AND DID NOT SEEK TO MAKE MEASURED JUDGEMENT IN THAT CONTEXT), BENN TOOK HIS COLLEAGUES AND POLITICAL OBSERVERS BY SURPRISE WITH CANDID AND EMOTIONAL ATTACK ON BRITISH MEMBERSHIP. THIS ATTACK CAUSED THE TIMES TO SPECULATE THAT BENN WAS LAYING GROUNDWORK FOR EVENTUAL RESIGNATION IF, AS IS GENERALLY EXPECTED, CABINET RECOMMENDS ACCEPTANCE OF EC RENEGOTIATION.

2. BENN LETTER CHARGED THAT BRITISH MEMBERSHIP ERODED BASIC RIGHTS OF BRITISH PEOPLE IN FOLLOWING RESPECTS:

- IT IMPOSES LAWS AND TAXES BY AUTHORITY WHICH IS NOT ELECTED AND CANNOT BE DISMISSED;
- PARLIAMENT CANNOT CHANGE OR REPEAL THESE LAWS AND TAXES;
- COURTS WOULD BE OBLIGED TO UPHOLD AND ENFORCE THESE STATUTES;
- GOVERNMENT WOULD BE FORCED TO IMPOSE "DUTIES AND CONSTRAINTS" WHICH DID NOT DERIVE FROM PARLIAMENT; AND
- EC AUTHORITIES ARE NOT ANSWERABLE TO BRITISH PEOPLE.

REGARDING PROPOSED REFERENDUM, BENN WROTE: "NO ONE WHO VOTES IN THE BALLOT BOX SHOULD BE IN ANY DOUBT AS TO THE EFFECT BRITISH MEMBERSHIP HAS HAD, AND WILL INCREASINGLY CONTINUE TO HAVE, IN REMOVING THE POWER THE BRITISH PEOPLE ONCE ENJOYED TO GOVERN THEMSELVES." ALTHOUGH LETTER INDICATED HE WOULD ACCEPT REFERENDUM VERDICT, IT DID

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NOT INDICATE WHETHER SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATIONS WOULD CAUSE HIM TO REVISE HIS VIEWS ON UNDESIRABILITY OF BRITISH MEMBERSHIP. THE PRESUMPTION IS THAT IT WOULD NOT. HE THUS PLACES HIMSELF AT ODDS WITH PRIME MINISTER WILSON WHO IN A DECEMBER 29 BBC RADIO INTERVIEW REITERATED THAT IF RENEGOTIATION SUCCEEDS, HE WILL RECOMMEND THAT THE BRITISH PEOPLE ENDORSE CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP (REF A).

3. MEDIA TREATED BENN LETTER, COMING DURING CHRISTMAS POLITICAL HIATUS, IN SENSATIONAL MANNER (E.G., GUARDIAN HEADLINES "BENN ENRAGES THE CABINET WITH EEC CHALLENGE") AND SPECULATED AT LENGTH ON IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DEVELOPMENT. PREDICTABLY, PRO-MARKETEERS ROASTED BENN AND CALLED FOR WILSON TO DISCIPLINE HIM. NEITHER WILSON NOR OTHER CABINET OFFICIALS HAVE YET COMMENTED FOR ATTRIBUTION.

4. PRESS REPORTS THAT LETTER TRIGGERED "DEEP ANGER" AMONG BENN'S CABINET COLLEAGUES BECAUSE: IT WAS DISTRIBUTED TO PRESS WITHOUT BEING VETTED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT; IT COULD PREJUDICE RENEGOTIATION EFFORT; AND IT STAKES GDS SPIERS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 16851

OUT AN APPARENTLY FIRM POSITION BEFORE THE CABINET HAD  
CONSIDERED THE ISSUE OR TAKEN A DECISION ON HOW GOVERN-  
MENT MEMBERS ARE TO CONDUCT THEMSELVES DURING THE  
REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN.

5. COMMENT: BENN'S LETTER CAN BE REGARDED AS THE OPEN-  
ING SALVO BY A LEADING ANTI-MARKETEER IN THE COMING  
REFERENDUM BATTLE (REF B). HIS DECISION TO GO PUBLIC  
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THIS EARLY IS A MEASURE OF THE ANXIETY MANY ANTI-  
MARKETEERS FEEL OVER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. THEY FEAR, NO  
DOUBT CORRECTLY, THAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN  
SECRETARY CALLAGHAN ARE PREPARING THE GROUND FOR MAKING A  
FAVORABLE RECOMMENDATION TO THE BRITISH ELECTORATE, AND  
THAT THEY WILL CARRY A MAJORITY OF THE CABINET WITH THEM.  
IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, BENN MAY RECKON HE HAS LITTLE TO  
LOSE BY MOUNTING A COUNTEROFFENSIVE BEFORE HIS CABINET  
COLLEAGUES HAVE TIME TO IMPOSE RESTRAINTS ON HIM. NONE-  
THELESS, HE HAS, FOR THE SECOND TIME IN TWO MONTHS, DIS-  
TANCED HIMSELF FROM THE PRIME MINISTER ON AN IMPORTANT  
QUESTION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY, AND THIS DESPITE A CLEAR  
WARNING FROM WILSON AFTER HIS EARLIER ACT OF DEFIANCE  
(REF C). IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN NOW HOW WILSON WILL DEAL  
WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF CABINET DISCIPLINE  
RAISED BY THE WAYWARD BENN'S ACTIONS. WHATEVER WILSON  
DOES, HE WILL HAVE TO BEAR IN MIND THE IMPLICATIONS OF  
HIS ACTIONS FOR THE COMING FIGHT OVER EC MEMBERSHIP AND  
FOR THE UNITY OF THE PARTY WHICH HE HAS STRUGGLED SO LONG  
TO PRESERVE.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** boyleja  
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**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
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**TAGS:** PINT, PGOV, UK, EEC, (BENN, ANTHONY)  
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**Type:** TE  
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